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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 001573

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [FUN](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: U.S.-EU ENLARGEMENT TROIKA: CROATIA

Classified By: USEU POLMC Chris Davis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Meeting with us to discuss Croatia as part of the working level "Enlargement and Countries Negotiating Access to the EU" dialogue or troika, October 8, our EU counterparts reported they were "very pleased" with accession negotiations. The Commission reported that statistics related to the number of chapters opened/closed did not portray that Croatia was already meeting benchmarks established for chapters still to be opened. Two "tricky" chapters remain - competition (state aid to shipyards) and the judiciary (chapter 23 which covers a range of issues to include minority rights). The Commission said that its November 5 report would provide a "fuller picture," be positive in tone, and that we "shouldn't expect any surprises." End Summary.

EU "Very Pleased" With Negotiations

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¶2. (C) Meeting with us October 8 as part of the U.S.-EU troika discussions on enlargement, representatives from the French Presidency, Council Secretariat, European Commission, and Czech permanent representation provided oloffs - led by USEU Pol MC - a mostly positiv overview of accession negotiations with Croatia. French presidency delegation head Joel Meyer (French MFA Deputy Director for the "Direction for European Affairs" department) reported in his national capacity that France noted "very positive progress" with "some work to do." Meyer said that France hoped as many chapters could be opened as possible and that "we want to go ahead with Croatia when Croatia is ready."

¶3. (C) The European Commission, represented by Allan Jones from the DG Enlargement Croatia Team, was equally positive in tone. Jones reported Croatia to be making excellent progress on most fronts, and the Commission was "very pleased" with the progress of accession negotiations. He cautioned that statistics related to the number of chapters opened/closed did not portray an accurate picture as Croatia was already meeting benchmarks established related to the 12 chapters still to be opened. Jones said that European Commission President Barroso's March statement suggesting an accession roadmap might be possible as early as fall 2008 was well received, leading to "much work by the Croatian side."

But "Thorny" Issues Remain

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¶4. (C) Jones said that two "tricky" chapters remained - chapters related to competition (state aid to the shipyard) and the judiciary (chapter 23 which covers a range of issues to include minority rights). He reported that having developed action plans to address these "thorny" issues, Croatia was now making good progress translating these plans into concrete actions - and results - on the ground. Jones highlighted Croatia's inefficient court system (pointing to an unwieldy network of courts and major case backlogs), corruption (the appointment of a special prosecutor and increase in indictments, but few results as of yet), and "war legacy" issues such as treatment of minorities and refugee cases (over 90,000 refugees still in neighboring countries) as areas which required the EU's careful attention. Jones noted the helpful role of the OSCE, specifically its efforts in the areas of war crime files and refugee return. (Note - Speaking with Poloff shortly after the discussion, Jones seemed genuinely surprised about our having questions concerning the extension of the OSCE presence. End Note)

¶5. (C) Jones said that Croatia's good intentions were not always visible in implementation. Regarding refugee return, while noting that "we detect they want to solve this," Jones said that it was crucial that the EU see a track record. Adding that while Croatia had met its 2007 refugee goals, Jones said that Croatia was already slipping in its 2008 goals and that the real test would be in 2009, when the goal would be higher, and some 10,000 families already having waited some 5 years to return would have to be reintegrated into Croatian society. On the subject of ensuring cooperation with ICTY, Jones said the EU needed to maintain

pressure on Croatia and other countries in the region. He said that Croatia will provide the results of its

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ICTY-related document investigation October 20, another "positive development." Sharing our concerns about organized crime, Jones suggested that the recent spike in "disturbing" criminal activity could be symptomatic of criminals' heightened concern about stronger law enforcement.

Outlook

16. (C) Following Jones's assessment of Croatia's progress to date, Meyer and future Czech presidency head for enlargement Radek Pech expressed satisfaction for both Croatia's efforts and promise. Pech said that the Western Balkans would figure prominently in the Czech presidency's foreign policy objectives and that "we want to achieve Croatian membership and see all Balkan membership efforts continue." Jones concluded that the Commission's November 5 report would provide a "fuller picture" of Croatia's efforts to date, be positive in tone, and that we "shouldn't expect any surprises."

SILVERBERG

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